

**IN THE UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE
BOARD OF PATENT APPEALS AND INTERFERENCES**

In re patent application of:) Date: March 5, 2008

Ronald P. Sansone, et al.) Attorney Docket No.: E-846

Serial No.: 09/316,795) Customer No.: 00919

Filed: May 21, 1999) Group Art Unit: 3628

Confirmation No.: 8309) Examiner: N. Nguyen

Title: **VIRTUAL POST OFFICE BOX**

CORRECTED APPELLANT'S BRIEF ON APPEAL

Sir:

This brief is in furtherance of the Notice of Appeal filed in this case on July 26, 2005, and the November 23, 2005, Notification of Non-Compliant Appeal brief.

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I. REAL PARTY IN INTEREST

Pitney Bowes Inc. is the real party in interest by way of assignment from the Appellant.

II. RELATED APPEALS AND INTERFERENCES

There are no related appeals or interferences that may directly affect or be directly affected by or have a bearing on the Board's decision in this appeal.

III. STATUS OF CLAIMS

- A) Claims 1 and 6 - 22 are in the application.
- B) Claims 2-5 are cancelled
- C) Claims 1 and 6 - 22 are rejected.
- D) Claims 1 and 6 - 22 are on appeal.

IV. STATUS OF AMENDMENTS

An Amendment subsequent to the April 27, 2005, Final Rejection was filed on June 17, 2005. This Amendment was not entered.

V. SUMMARY OF CLAIMED SUBJECT MATTER

A. Background

The prior art does not determine in one or more data bases recipient's name, recipient's desired delivery address and the address to which the owner of a virtual post office box wants their mail forwarded.

Ever since the numeric codification of streets and buildings received general acceptance, an individual's name and household postal address have been linked. The sender of a letter or package would deliver a letter or package to the post that had the correct recipient postal address, and the post would deliver the letter or package to the numeric street address of the recipient of the letter or package. A correct recipient postal address for the delivery of the letter or package to the recipient included: the name of the recipient; the street address of the recipient; the city and state of the recipient; and the zip code of the recipient. Thus, the correct recipient postal address is usually the actual location of the recipient.

The post also delivers letters and packages to post office boxes. A post office box is a locked receptacle, located at a specific post office, where the box has been assigned to a specific recipient so that correctly addressed letters and packages may be delivered to the box by the post and be removed by the recipient. A correct recipient post office box address for the delivery of the letter or package to the recipient's post office box included: the name of the recipient; the number of the post office box of the recipient; the city and state where the recipient's post office box is located; and the zip code of the post office where the recipient's post office box is located.

One of the reasons why recipients of letters and packages rent post office boxes is that the recipient does not want the sender of the letter or package to know the actual location of the recipient. The above reason for having post office boxes has increased dramatically in the past few years, because many people are conducting business from their

homes, and do not want certain senders of letters and packages to know the location of their homes. Thus, there has been a tremendous increase in the use of post office boxes. Consequently, the post at certain post offices is experiencing a shortage of post office boxes.

A disadvantage of the prior art is that renters of post office boxes have to go to the post office where the post office box is located to receive their letters and packages. Thus, the owners of business have to leave their home and others are expending additional time to retrieve their letters and packages.

Another disadvantage of the prior art is that if renters of post office boxes do not remove their letters and packages before the post office box is full, the post has to specially handle the excess letters and packages.

A further disadvantage of the prior art is that post office boxes consume a large amount of space at post offices.

An additional disadvantage of the prior art is that when the renter of a post office box goes to a different location, i.e., on vacation, there is no mechanism for redirecting the letters and packages located in the post office box to the different location.

B. APPELLANT'S CLAIMED INVENTION

Appellants claim a method that determines in one or more data bases recipient's name, recipient's desired delivery address and the address to which the owner of a virtual post office box wants their mail forwarded.

This invention overcomes the disadvantages of the prior art by providing a method that enables the post to deliver letters, flats, post cards and packages (mail) addressed to a recipient's virtual post office box to be delivered directly to the recipient. The invention enables individuals or entities to rent a virtual post office (VPO) box i.e., a box that does not physically exist, from the post. Mail addressed to the virtual post office box would be captured by the post during the post's sortation process and rerouted to the specified address of the renter of the virtual post office box.

An advantage of this invention is that a renter of a virtual post office box may receive mail at a specified location, while parties who send mail to the virtual post office box will not know the specified location.

An additional advantage of this invention is that mail can be easily redirected from one specified location to another specified location.

A further advantage of this invention is that virtual post office boxes do not take up any space and an unlimited number of boxes may be issued.

The foregoing objectives are realized by the present invention, which includes a method for forwarding mail by a post that is addressed to a recipient at a virtual post office box to be directly to the recipient.

Claim 1 is the only independent claim in this patent application. Claim 1 relates to a method for forwarding mail by a post that is addressed to a recipient at a virtual post office box to be delivered directly to a recipient without the recipient going to the post. Claim 1 includes the following steps: receiving recipient's name and recipient's desired delivery address; assigning a virtual post office box identification for individual recipients; relating

recipient's virtual post office box with the desired delivery address of the recipients; delivering to recipients their assigned virtual post office box's identification; placing virtual post office boxes on mail; reading mail to capture virtual post office box identification, when present; determining recipient's desired delivery address from virtual post office box identification and recipient's name; determining in one or more data bases that recipient's name is listed with recipient's desired delivery address and is the address to which the owner of the virtual post office box wants the mail forwarded, wherein the forwarding information may be sent by telephone, physical mail, or facsimile; placing recipient's desired delivery address on mail in coded form and human readable form; and delivering mail to the desired delivery address of the recipients.

Appellant's invention is shown in Fig. 3B, line 26 of page 7 to line 4 of page 8.

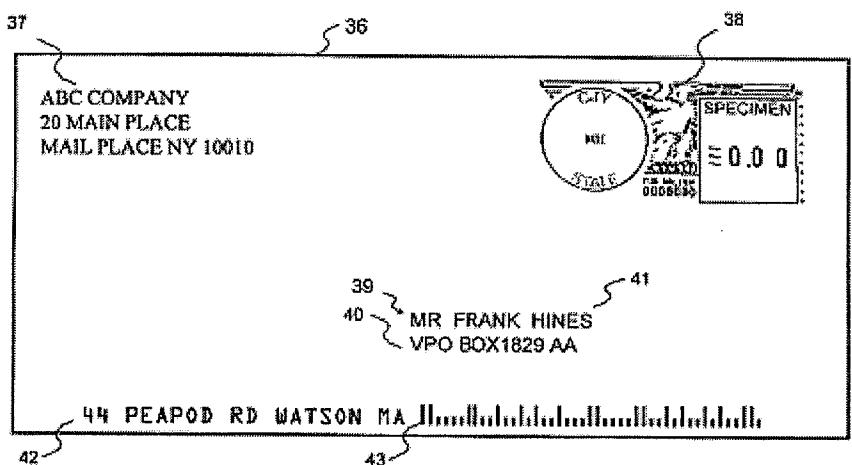


Fig. 3B

Fig. 3B is a drawing of a mail piece addressed to a virtual post office (VPO) box in

which the post has indicated the actual delivery address of the mail piece. Mail piece 36 has a sender address field 37 and material 38 that indicates the payment of the postage for mail piece 36. Material 38 may be a postal indicia, postal permit or one or more stamps. The recipient address field 39 will include the designation 40 for a virtual post office box and the box number, i.e., VPO etc., and the number of the virtual post office box and the person or entity 41 to whom mail piece 36 is sent. The post will print the actual delivery address 42 to which the lessee of the virtual post office box wants mail piece 36 delivered. The post will also print a posnet bar code 43 on the face of mail piece 36. Bar code 43 represents delivery address 42 in a coded form.

Mail that has been scanned by postal bar code sorter 12 and mail that has been scanned by scanners 13 and 14 (Fig. 1) will be checked by virtual post office box data center 75 (Figs. 1 and 2) if scanners 12, 13 or 14 detect a virtual post office box in the recipient address field of the mail, i.e., VPO Box 182945AA, or scan a virtual post office box in the bar code affixed to the mail by the mailer. Virtual post office box data center 75 contains a virtual post office name/address relational data base 68 (Fig. 4). Data base 68 will use the virtual post office box number to determine the actual destination that the recipient wants the mail delivered to. The foregoing may be accomplished by looking up the virtual post office box in data base 68 and determining the address that the owner of the virtual post office box wanted their mail forwarded. Data base 68 supplies information to sorters 12, 13 and 14 and re-coder 18 via computer 54 (Fig. 4) so that sorters 12, 13 and 14 and re-coder 18 will place a bar code 43 (Fig 3B) on the mail that indicates the zip code that the owner of the virtual post office box wants their mail forwarded. Sorters 12, 13 and 14

and re-coder 18 will also print the street, city and state (actual delivery address 42) that the owner of the virtual post office box wants their mail forwarded in human readable form.

VI. GROUNDS OF REJECTION TO BE REVIEWED ON APPEAL

- A. Whether or not claims 1, 6 and 7 -21 are patentable under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) over Boies et al. (U.S. Patent No. 6,006,200) in view of Moore (U.S. Patent 5,452,203), Whitehouse (U.S. patent 6,005,945) and Allum (U.S. Patent No. 5,420,403).
- B. Whether or not claims 7 is patentable under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) over Boies et al. (U.S. Patent No. 6,006,200) in view of Moore (U.S. Patent 5,452,203), Whitehouse (U.S. patent 6,005,945) and Allum (U.S. Patent No. 5,420,403).
- C. Whether or not claims 8 - 10 are patentable under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) over Boies et al. (U.S. Patent No. 6,006,200) in view of Moore (U.S. Patent 5,452,203), Whitehouse (U.S. patent 6,005,945) and Allum (U.S. Patent No. 5,420,403).
- D. Whether or not claims 12 and 13 are patentable under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) over Boies et al. (U.S. Patent No. 6,006,200) in view of Moore (U.S. Patent 5,452,203), Whitehouse (U.S. patent 6,005,945) and Allum (U.S. Patent No. 5,420,403).
- E. Whether or not claims 16 - 20 are patentable under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) over Boies et al. (U.S. Patent No. 6,006,200) in view of Moore (U.S. Patent 5,452,203), Whitehouse (U.S. patent 6,005,945) and Allum (U.S. Patent No. 5,420,403).
- F. Whether or not claims 21 is patentable under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) over Boies et al. (U.S. Patent No. 6,006,200) in view of Moore (U.S. Patent 5,452,203), Whitehouse (U.S. patent 6,005,945) and Allum (U.S. Patent No. 5,420,403).

VII. ARGUMENTS

A. **Claims 1, 6 and 7 -21 have been rejected by the Examiner under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) over Boies et al. (U.S. Patent No. 6,006,200) in view of Moore (U.S. Patent 5,452,203), Whitehouse (U.S. patent 6,005,945) and Allum (U.S. Patent No. 5,420,403).**

Boies discloses the following in lines 30-64 of column 2:

“The process is illustrated in more detail in FIGS. 2A, 2B and 2C, to which reference is now made. A transaction begins at block **201** with the user wanting a product that cannot be sent electronically, i.e., over the Internet. An initial determination is made in decision block **202** as to whether the user has an address code. If not, the mailing address information is collected from the user in function block **203**. Next, in function block **204**, the registry is contacted to obtain an address code. This routine is shown in more detail in FIG. 2B and begins with validating the address in function block **205**. An address code is assigned in function block **206**, and this code is saved in function block **207** to the shipping company’s master file database **208** before a return is made in function block **209** to the main routine in FIG. 2A where the code is displayed and saved to the user’s computer in function block **210**.

Referring again to FIG. 2A, once the user has an address code then a determination is made in decision block **211** as to whether the address code is available. If not, the user is prompted to enter the address code in function block **212**; otherwise, the code is directly retrieved from the user’s hard disk in function block **213**. The address code is added to the order form in function block **214**, and the order is submitted in function block **215**.

Referring now to FIG. 2C, when the vendor receives the order, the vendor optionally creates a printed, machine readable representation of the address code on the shipping label in function block **216**. The address code is printed to on [sic] the shipping label in function block **217**, and the package is sent to the shipping company in function

block **218**. The shipping company uses the machine readable address code printed on the shipping label to access the master file **208** (FIG. 2B) to retrieve the user 'shipping [sic] address for delivery of the package."

Boies discloses the following in column 2, lines 11-22:

"The method used in this invention is to employ a third party vendor to supply a unique identifier to the customer that maps to the customer's name and address in a database owned by the third party. The personal identifier is a multi-digit numeric or alphanumeric code assigned to a customer, as indicated at **10**. This code is an accepted field by the vendor **12** that is used for shipping purposes. The shipper **14** is the creator and custodian of the codes. It generates a unique code for each customer, which code is associated with the customer's full shipping address and, optionally, the customer's name, permitting shipment to be made to the customer **16**."

In other words, Boies' customer receives a customer number that is assigned by the shipper of the goods **14**. Boies' customer would give the customer number to the seller of the goods to remain anonymous. The seller, in turn, would give the customer number to the shipper with the goods. Then the shipper would obtain the customer's address from the customer number.

Boies is not determining in one or more data bases that recipient's name is listed with recipient's desired delivery address and is the address to which the owner of the virtual post office box wants the mail forwarded, wherein the forwarding information may be sent by telephone, physical mail, or facsimile. For instance, when the customer gives Boies' seller the customer number, which may contain many alphanumeric characters, the customer may communicate with the seller over the telephone and give the seller the incorrect customer number, or the seller may copy the customer number incorrectly. The

seller may also give the incorrect customer number. Thus, the goods may be delivered to the wrong party.

Moore's United States Patent 5,452,203 discloses the following in col. 1, lines 46-60:

"For example, assuming a shipper's customer shipping list includes the address "Pitney Bowes Inc., 35 Waterview Drive, Shelton, Conn. 06484", and the shipper attempts to sanitize its shipping list in order to add the zip-code. IN practice, the database of mailing addresses and customer shipping list are processed in a personal computer programmed to make a comparison between the respective addresses in the database and shipping list and generate a sanitized customer shipping list which includes the proper mailing address. When this occurs the sanitized shipping list will include the address "Pitney Bowes, Inc., Box 3000, Shelton, Conn. 06484-8000", since the mailing address for Pitney Bowes' 35 Waterview Drive facility is a Post Office Box and not the facility itself."

Thus, Moore discloses an apparatus for correcting addresses.

Allum et al. discloses the following in his abstract:

"Mail can be sorted automatically to point of delivery level by deriving from the address including postal code on a piece of mail a suffix which together with the postal code forms routing data which uniquely identifies the final delivery address. This is achieved automatically at the Post office sorting facility by means of an optical character reader which reads the addresses on mail items and a computer arranged to generate a suffix based on the address read. The routing data is printed as a bar code on the mail item and this allows the complete sortation to be effected automatically. Also contemplated is a progressive encoding system which can be applied as bar codes by customers as desired to mail pieces. The basic data is the routing data set to which can be added a shipment number which allows automatic revenue accounting control and a piece number which allows automatic track and trace. Finally, the customer may also progressively encode return mail envelopes with the shipment number followed by a product code and a user defined field which permits automatic specialized handling of the return mail item."

The bar code disclosed by Allum in Figs. 7 and 8 is nothing more than the Canadian equivalent of the United States Postal Service's post net bar code. The post net bar code allows postal sorting equipment to sort mail pieces to recipient's building. In many areas, office buildings and apartment houses contain many occupants. Thus, without the recipient's name, the letter carrier would not know which occupant should receive the mail piece.

Whitehouse discloses the following in lines 57-65 of column 12:

"The central computer, after decrypting the request message, validates the postal indicium request by verifying the digital signature, if any, in the request, and validating the meter or account ID and account password in the request message (step 202, by validation procedure 161). If the meter/account ID does not correspond to an active postage dispensing account, or if the password is incorrect, an error message is returned to the request sender."

Whitehouse is verifying a digital signature. Boies et al, Allum et al., Whitehouse, or Moore, taken separately or together, do not disclose or anticipate the invention claimed by Appellant's in claim 1 and those claims dependent thereon. The cited references do not disclose or anticipate the steps of determining in one or more data bases that recipient's name is listed with recipient's desired delivery address and is the address to which the owner of the virtual post office box wants the mail forwarded, wherein the forwarding information may be sent by telephone, physical mail, or facsimile and placing recipient's desired delivery address on mail in coded form and human-readable form. The foregoing insures that the mail could be delivered to the recipient.

Notwithstanding the foregoing, in rejecting a claim under 35 U.S.C. §103, the Examiner is charged with the initial burden for providing a factual basis to support the obviousness conclusion. *In re Warner*, 379 F.2d 1011, 154 USPQ 173 (CCPA 1967); *in re Lunsford*, 375 F.2d 385, 148 USPQ 721 (CCPA 1966); *in re Freed*, 425 F.2d 785, 165 USPQ 570 (CCPA 1970). The Examiner is also required to explain how and why one having ordinary skill in the art would have been led to modify an applied reference and/or combine applied references to arrive at the claimed invention. *In re Ochiai*, 37 USPQ2d 1127 (Fed. Cir. 1995); *in re Deuel*, 51 F.3d 1552, 34 USPQ 1210 (Fed. Cir. 1995); *in re Fritch*, 972 F.2d 1260, 23 USPQ 1780 (Fed. Cir. 1992); *Uniroyal, Inc. v. Rudkin-Wiley Corp.*, 837 F.2d 1044, 5 USPQ2d 1434 (Fed. Cir. 1988). In establishing the requisite motivation, it has been consistently held that both the suggestion and reasonable expectation of success must stem from the prior art itself, as a whole. *In re Ochiai*, *supra*; *in re Vaeck*, 947 F.2d 488, 20 USPQ2d 1438 (Fed. Cir. 1991); *in re Fine*, 837 F.2d 1071, 5 USPQ2d 1596 (Fed. Cir. 1988); *in re Dow Chemical Co.*, 837 F.2d 469, 5 USPQ2d 1529 (Fed. Cir. 1988).

B. Claim 7 has been rejected by the Examiner under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) over Boies et al. (U.S. Patent No. 6,006,200) in view of Moore (U.S. Patent 5,452,203), Whitehouse (U.S. patent 6,005,945) and Allum (U.S. Patent No. 5,420,403).

Claim 6 depends on claim 1, and claim 7 depends on claim 6. Claim 6, claims, an additional step of claim 1, namely changing recipient's desired delivery address in accordance with recipient's instructions. Claim 6, claims, an additional step of claim 1, i.e.,

allowing the recipient to specify the time period in which mail is going to be delivered to the desired delivery address.

The Examiner stated the following on Page 6 of the April 27, 2005, Final Rejection:

"With regards to claim 7 the combination of Boies et al., Moore, Whitehouse and Allum does not illustrate the method claimed in claim 6, "wherein the changing step: recipient specifies the time period in which mail is going to be delivered to the desired delivery address." However, it is old and well-known practice to specify the time period in which mail is going to be delivered to the changed delivery address (i.e., when someone is on vacation, it has been a common practice to notify the post office to reroute the mail to a next neighbor or hold until the person comes back from the vacation), and nothing unobvious is seen to have been involved simply having employed this old well-known practice for the claimed method to facilitate the mail delivery."

In addition to the arguments made in above paragraph A.

It is true that the post office holds mail while someone is on vacation or forwards mail to the recipient. However, the post office only delivers mail addressed to a post office box to the recipient's post office box. The post office does not deliver mail addressed to a post office box recipient to the recipient's desired delivery address or allow the recipient to change its desired delivery address during specified periods of time.

The post office also does not determine recipient's desired delivery address from the virtual post office box identification and recipient's name; verify in one or more data bases that recipient's name is listed with recipient's desired delivery address and place recipient's desired delivery address on mail in coded form and human readable form on the mail.

C. Claims 8 - 10 have been rejected by the Examiner under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) over Boies et al. (U.S. Patent No. 6,006,200) in view of Moore (U.S. Patent 5,452,203), Whitehouse (U.S. patent 6,005,945) and Allum (U.S. Patent No. 5,420,403).

The Examiner stated the following on Page 7 of the April 27, 2005, Final Rejection:

"With regards to claims 8, 9 and 10: the combination of Boies et al., Moore, Whitehouse and Allum does not illustrate the well-known details whereby the method claimed in claim 1, further includes the step of: billing for the number of times (or metering) recipient's changed their desired delivery address. However, it is a fundamental practice of the service provider to charge when services are used and charged and at the end of the billing cycle providing a metering of these services in a billing statement as a means of making more money. Thus, it would have been within the level of ordinary skill in the art to employ this fundamental practice to the claimed method to increase the profit."

In addition to the arguments made in above paragraph A.

The Examiner has not cited any art in the context of the claimed invention that shows that it would be obvious to bill for the number of times recipient's changed their desired delivery address (claim 8); meter the number of times recipient's desired delivery address was determined (claim 9) or bill for the number of times recipient's desired delivery address was determined (claim 10).

D. Claims 12 and 13 have been rejected by the Examiner under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) over Boies et al. (U.S. Patent No. 6,006,200) in view of Moore

(U.S. Patent 5,452,203), Whitehouse (U.S. patent 6,005,945) and Allum (U.S. Patent No. 5,420,403).

The Examiner stated the following on Pages 7 and 8 of the April 27, 2005, Final Rejection:

With regard to claims 12 and 13 the combination of Boies et. al., Moore, Whitehouse, and Allum et. al. does not illustrate the well known details whereby the method claimed in claim 1, further including the steps of: (a) assigning access codes to recipients that are related to recipient's virtual post office box, (b) delivering access codes to recipients, (c) receiving recipient's names, access code and recipient's intention to change their delivery address, and (d) changing recipient's delivery address upon confirmation of recipient's names and access code and (e) confirming recipient's virtual post office box (However SEE Boies et. al. column 4, lines 12-15 "notifying by a customer a change" wherein of course, to keep anonymity and privacy (see the abstract of Boies), the use of the claimed steps of a-e would have been obvious).

Boies discloses the following in column 4 lines 12-15:

"5. the method recited in claim 1 further comprising notifying by a customer a change of address to the trusted third party in order to effect a change of address."

Boies discloses the following in his abstract:

"Transactions are conducted on the internet, by telephone or directly with anonymity and privacy. A customer's shipping address is encoded by a multi-digit identifier which is stored in the database of a trusted third party, preferably the shipping company. A user of the system need only identify themselves to a vendor by this multi-digit identifier which prints the identifier in machine readable form on a package delivered to the shipper."

In addition to the arguments made in above paragraph A.

The Examiner has not cited any art in the context of the claimed invention that shows that it would be obvious to: assign access codes to recipients that are related to recipient's

virtual post office box; deliver access codes to recipients; receive recipient's name, access code and recipient's intention to change their delivery address and charge recipients delivery address upon conformation of recipients name and access code (claim 12) or confirming recipient's virtual post office box (claim 13).

E. Claims 16 - 20 have been rejected by the Examiner under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) over Boies et al. (U.S. Patent No. 6,006,200) in view of Moore (U.S. Patent 5,452,203), Whitehouse (U.S. patent 6,005,945) and Allum (U.S. Patent No. 5,420,403).

The Examiner stated the following on Page 9 of the April 27, 2005, Final Rejection:

With regards to claims 16, 17, 18, 19 and 20 the combination of Boies et. al., Moore, Whitehouse and Allum et. al. does not illustrate all of the standard conventional practices whereby the method claimed in claim 12, wherein recipient's name, access code and recipient's intention to change their delivery address will be received by telephone, facsimile, computer, in person, received by mail, (However SEE Boies et. al. column 4, lines 12-15 "notifying by a customer change" wherein those above methods of communications are well known methods as desired to notify the changes of the personal information to effect the change of the address and further the one you use is not critical to the practice of Boies et. al. or applicant.

Column 4 lines 12-15 of Boies read as follows

"5. the method recited in claim 1 further comprising notifying by a customer a change of address to the trusted third party in order to effect a change of address."

In addition to the arguments made in above paragraph A.

The Examiner has not cited any art in the context of the claimed invention that shows that it would be obvious for: recipient's name, access code and recipient's intention to change their delivery address to be received by telephone (claim 16), facsimile (claim 17), computer (claim 18), in person (claim 19), and by mail (claim 20).

F. Claim 21 has been rejected by the Examiner under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) over Boies et al. (U.S. Patent No. 6,006,200) in view of Moore (U.S. Patent 5,452,203), Whitehouse (U.S. patent 6,005,945) and Allum (U.S. Patent No. 5,420,403).

The Examiner stated the following on Page 9 of the April 27, 2005, Final Rejection:

With regard to claim 21 the combination of Boies et. al., Moore, Whitehouse and Allum et. al. does not illustrate the method claimed in claim 12, wherein recipient's access code is encrypted (however, it is a well known practice in the art to encrypt any vital information in the art to prevent fraudulent access of personal account or database and it would have been common sense to employ this well known practice for the claimed method to further enhance the anonymity and privacy (SEE the abstract of Boies) of the recipient.

Boies abstract reads as follows:

"Transactions are conducted on the internet, by telephone or directly with anonymity and privacy. A customer's shipping address is encoded by a multi-digit identifier which is stored in the database of a trusted third party, preferably the shipping company. A user of the system need only identify themselves to a vendor by this multi-digit identifier which prints the identifier in machine readable form on a package delivered to the shipper."

In addition to the arguments made in above paragraph A.

The Examiner has not cited any art in the context of the claimed invention that shows that it would be obvious for recipient's access code is encrypted.

I. PRAYER FOR RELIEF

In view of the above, Appellants respectfully submit that appealed claims 1 and 6 - 22 in this application are patentable. It is requested that the Board of Appeal overrule the Examiner and direct allowance of the rejected claims.

Respectfully submitted,

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